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Norovirus

What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis (or nausea, vomiting and diarrhea). Viruses are very different from bacteria and parasites, some of which can cause illnesses similar to norovirus infection. Viruses are much smaller, are not affected by antibiotic treatment, and cannot grow outside of a host (for example, an animal or a human).

How do you get it?

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of an infected person. People can become infected with norovirus by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, by touching objects or surfaces contaminated with norovirus, and then placing the hand or object in the mouth, or by direct contact with an infected person.

Norovirus can also be found in shellfish, especially oysters and clams.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. Some people may have a mild fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. The illness is usually short, with symptoms lasting only about 1 or 2 days.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after exposure to the virus, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.

What is the treatment for norovirus infection?

There is no medicine that works against norovirus and there is no vaccine to prevent infection. Treatment is given to support an infected person through the symptoms. Severe diarrhea and/or vomiting over a long time may cause the body to lose fluid too quickly. Lost fluids should be replaced by drinking liquids such as fruit juices, soups, and special fluids called oral rehydration fluids (ORF).

If you get norovirus once, can you get it again?

Yes. There are many different types of norovirus, and being infected with one will not protect you from getting another. Any time you are infected with a different type of norovirus, you could become ill again.

Should an infected person stay away from school or work?

Yes. People with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days after the symptoms stop. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery. It is important for people to use good hand washing practices after they have gotten better from norovirus illness.

How can you keep from getting it?

Wash your hands well after using the toilet, changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. After changing diapers, wash the child's hands as well as your own.

Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and cook or steam oysters before eating them.

Immediately clean and disinfect surfaces contaminated with stool or vomit by using bleach-based household cleaner.

Immediately remove and wash soiled clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus (use hot water and soap).

Flush or discard any vomit and/or stool in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-qa.htm>